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ANSWERS

CATHOLIC SOCIAL TEACHING

Catholic Answers

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Introduction

Catholic social teaching has been called the Church's "best-kept secret," suggesting that most people, Catholic or non-Catholic, would embrace the teaching if only they knew it.

That's a little too optimistic. There are plenty of reasons to suppose that not even a thoughtful presentation will persuade everyone. Not everyone was persuaded by Christ to accept the coming kingdom of God by becoming his disciple. We shouldn't expect everyone to be won over simply by letting out the Church's "best-kept secret."

Indeed, as a longtime student and teacher of Catholic social teaching and as a former director of social ministry for a Catholic diocese, I can say that ignorance of the teaching isn't the only problem, either for Catholics or for non-Catholics. Instead it's often a question of the heart more than of the head.

That said, often the issue *is* a question of people not knowing what the Church teaches and why. And when people "discover" the secret, frequently it transforms them. I have known non-Catholics who became Catholics as a result of their encounter with Catholic social teaching. For the non-Catholic Christians among them, they recognized the voice of Christ in the teaching of the Church. For the non-Christians, they saw the work of God in the work of Christ's people, the Church.

What about Catholics? We too need conversion. We need faith formation, to be sure. Faith formation starts with *in*formation—with the content of the Church's teaching. The same applies to formation in the social teaching of the Church.

But faith formation involves more than getting information, even more than profound understanding of great ideas and insights into the truth—as valuable as those things are. Faith formation involves growth in faith. Hence conversion: *ongoing* conversion.

For the Catholic, Catholic social teaching should involve growth in faith as a disciple of Jesus. It is instruction in how a disciple of Jesus lives well

with others in society and how society ought to be shaped, through what influence Christians may have, to reflect God's purpose for humanity. And insofar as Catholic social teaching provides direction for action, it should deepen charity—love of God and love of neighbor—by proper deeds.

A little book such as this can only scratch the surface of what the Church—and Christ through the Church—has to say about how human beings are intended to live well together. It's but a beginning. Still, although the beginning of a journey isn't its conclusion, the conclusion can't be reached without the beginning.

1. What is Catholic social teaching?

Catholic social teaching is Jesus' teaching on how human beings should live with one another—in the family, in society, and in the world. Obviously, all sorts of refinements and qualifications to that broad statement can be made. The point is to start with Jesus, lest we lose sight of a fundamental truth. There is, ultimately, *one* authoritative Teacher in the Catholic Church: Jesus Christ (Matt. 23:10; Luke 10:16; *Catechism of the Catholic Church* [CCC] 79, 85, 87). The Church sometimes adopts concepts and introduces ideas to help people understand and apply Jesus' teaching. Nevertheless, we should think of Catholic social teaching as an aspect of the teaching of the *Lord*, even though it is presented by his Church (CCC 2422).

Jesus inaugurated the kingdom of God on earth (Mark 1:14–15). That kingdom transcends specific location; it is the proper ordering of human relationships according to God's purpose, wherever people happen to reside. Living according to God's law, by his power, for his purposes, makes people subjects of his kingdom. By teaching about the kingdom and living in obedience to the Father's mission for him, Jesus fully revealed God's purpose for mankind. He taught us how to live. Through the gift of the Holy Spirit to the Church at Pentecost, he made his grace available to humanity and made all human beings able to become part of the family of God.

The Church is the *beginning* or *seed* of the kingdom of God (*Lumen Gentium* 5; cf. CCC 541). The Church carries on the teaching of Jesus and, by the power of his Holy Spirit, interprets his teaching throughout history, applying it to the concrete situations of human life. Catholic social teaching is part of that teaching. It is the body of principles for reflection, criteria for judgment, and directives for action aimed at promoting the proper ordering of human relationships according to the standards of the gospel. In other words, Catholic social teaching helps us to understand how to live well together, as God intends (CCC 2423).

2. What are the main principles of Catholic social teaching?

Catholic social teaching, like all the Church's ethical teaching, rests on the commandments of charity: love God above all things and love neighbor as oneself. Those two "great commandments" expand into more specific principles.

First, there is the principle of the *social obligation to acknowledge God*. Positively, this involves how society honors God and acknowledges him as the source of human dignity. Negatively, it involves society not violating people's freedom to worship or their freedom to obey God in how they shape their lives (CCC 2104–2109).

After the social acknowledgment of God come principles concerning how human beings ought to live together in society. The Church states these principles in various ways. *The Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, published by the Vatican's Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace in 2004, lists the following principles: 1) the dignity of the human person, 2) the common good, 3) subsidiarity, and 4) solidarity.

The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops provides a somewhat expanded list of items, referred to as "themes" of Catholic social teaching: 1) the life and dignity of the human person; 2) the call to family, community, and participation; 3) rights and responsibilities; 4) option for the poor and vulnerable; 5) the dignity of work and the rights of workers; 6) solidarity; and 7) care for God's creation.[1]

These lists aren't exactly the same, but they summarize closely related ideas drawn from the primary sources of Catholic social teaching: Sacred Scripture, Catholic tradition, especially the teaching of the early Church Fathers, the Magisterium of the Church, especially papal social teaching starting with Leo XIII (r. 1878–1903) and the teaching of the Second Vatican Council (1962–1965). After Vatican II, Popes Paul VI (r. 1963–1978), John Paul II (r. 1978–2005), Benedict XVI (r. 2005–2013), and Francis (r. 2013–) all made significant contributions to Catholic social teaching.

Social justice and *human rights* are often also included as principles of Catholic social teaching. These are bound up with the notions of human dignity and the common good mentioned above, and we will discuss social justice in some detail elsewhere. Here, let's look briefly at human rights.

Human rights are claims in justice that we possess in relation to one another by virtue of being human. They are what used to be more commonly called *natural rights*—that is, rights stemming from human *nature* rather than from convention or agreement. They involve what justice *naturally* requires of us when we act or refrain from acting in relation to others.

Human rights, according to Catholic teaching, are "hardwired" into us because we are made in the image of God and called to the happiness of love through knowing God and living well in relation to one another (CCC 1700). Human rights—claims we justly make on one another—exist because our human dignity includes responsibilities to pursue the good, and rights help us fulfill those responsibilities (*Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church* 156). What's more, if you have a right or claim in justice in relation to me, I have a responsibility or duty toward you. Rights and responsibilities are linked together.

In the Catholic view, human rights are not merely the most fundamental agreed-upon terms of our common participation in the political community, as some people who hold to a "social-contract" theory of government claim. Human rights aren't the invention of government, nor do they bind us

simply because we agree to them. Human rights exist *prior* to society and prior to any arrangements or agreements people make to live together. They're not "negotiable"; they *must* be recognized and fostered by any just political order or society.[2]

3. Would you say that Catholic social teaching is conservative, liberal, or moderate?

Those adjectives notoriously admit of various meanings. Let's apply some common uses of the terms *conservative*, *liberal*, and *moderate*. The Catholic Church has a "conservative" attitude toward fundamental human institutions, values, and ways of behaving—to human dignity, marriage and family, social life, and government, for example. The Church is rightly said to be "conservative" in its defense of these basic human realities because it wants to conserve them.

At the same time, Catholic social teaching is an aspect of the gospel of Jesus Christ. The gospel involves *radical* conversion and liberation from sin. All is not right with man. Sin deeply affects human life and social institutions. If "liberal" is a word used to refer to someone who favors change in order to "liberate" people from social evils, then we can say there is a deeply "liberal" dimension to Catholic social teaching.

And, of course, we can think of a "moderate" as one who stands between extremes. Catholic social teaching *moderates* between an inappropriate conservatism, which holds on to attitudes, values, ways of acting, and institutions that *ought t*o change, and inappropriate liberalism, which doesn't promote genuine liberation but undermines or outright attacks things that *ought not* to change.

Whether a given teaching of the Church is conservative, liberal, or moderate depends on the values, activities, and institutions of a given society. What would be conservative in one society might be liberal or moderate in another. Insisting that marriage is a social institution uniting one man and one woman in an exclusive, permanent, life-sharing relationship ordered to children is a conservative idea in our society today.

But the same idea might be liberal in a culture where polygamy and concubinage are common and longstanding practices.

Sometimes when people claim that Catholic social teaching isn't actually conservative or actually liberal, they mean that the proper understanding of Catholic teaching, and the best application of it, won't lead to conservative or liberal positions. Yet it can happen that Catholic teaching properly understood and applied *will* result in relatively conservative or liberal (or moderate) stances on key issues in a given society at a particular time.

To take a fanciful example: in the fictional totalitarian society of Orwell's *1984*, a Catholic who wanted to alter society radically to respect human rights and freedom would be a liberal. A Catholic living in Orwell's world before the rise of its totalitarianism who resisted the emergence of Big Brother would take a conservative position, because he would seek to conserve the good in the world of his time and oppose changing it.

In the real world, when the Church opposed racial segregation in the U.S. during the 1960s it adopted a relatively "liberal" stance. When today the Church insists that marriage is the union of one man and one woman, and thus opposes treating same-sex union as "marriage," she takes a relatively conservative position.

Catholic teaching can, therefore, be described as conservative or liberal based in part on the values of the society in which the Church finds itself. The Church can also be deemed liberal on some issues in a given society while characterized as conservative on others. Thus, the proper understanding of Catholic teaching can sometimes lead to conservative or liberal stances on particular issues in a particular historical situation. In this sense, the Church's teaching is not "above" or "beyond" being accurately characterized as conservative or liberal (or moderate), even if it remains true that Church teaching doesn't as a whole require alignment with conservative or liberal (or moderate) positions.

Finally, we must note that sometimes good, informed, and equally committed Catholics may legitimately disagree about how properly to apply the Church teaching they both affirm, with someone taking a more liberal

approach while another person adopts a more conservative stance, and someone else embraces a moderate position. Committed Catholics aren't always going to agree. It's not always going to be clear whether there is a single Catholic position on an issue, much less whether the Catholic position is liberal or conservative (or moderate). Nevertheless, sometimes there are settled Catholic positions, and Catholics ought to embrace these positions, regardless of whether others deem the positions as conservative, liberal, or moderate.

4. Does the Church teach that all issues involving the principles of Catholic social teaching are equally important?

Because Catholic social teaching concerns human dignity, human life, and the proper arrangement of human society, all the issues it touches on are important but not necessarily *equally* important. Their importance can vary depending on the principles involved, the goods and evils at stake, the resources available to promote good and overcome evil, and the obligations and commitments different people may have.

Not all good actions, good practices, or just institutions necessarily equally promote the principles of Catholic social teaching, and not all bad actions, bad practices, or evil institutions necessarily equally violate them. For example, the right to private property is an aspect of the dignity of the human person. If a street gang widely "tags" with graffiti the homes in a neighborhood, the gang violates people's property rights. That's wrong. But it isn't *as* wrong as the street gang murdering people. The right to private property is not, *as such*, as important as the right to life, even though both rights are foundational for human thriving.

Sometimes it is a matter of how one issue relates to another. For example, Pope St. John Paul II defended what he called "the inviolability of the human person." This idea is related to the principle of human dignity, one of the fundamental ideas of Catholic social teaching as we have seen. According to John Paul II, the inviolability of the person "finds its primary and fundamental expression in the *inviolability of human life."* In other

words, in order to respect the dignity of a human being, we must first and foremost respect his right to live.

John Paul II continues: "Above all, the common outcry, which is justly made on behalf of human rights—for example, the right to health, to home, to work, to family, to culture—is false and illusory if the right to life, the most basic and fundamental right and the condition for all other personal rights, is not defended with maximum determination" (*Christifidelis Laici* 38).

Take away someone's right to life, and you effectively nullify his other rights. Issues directly touching on the right to life, then, will tend to be more important than issues involving rights dependent on the right to life. But the fact that some issues can be more important than others doesn't mean the other issues are therefore unimportant.

In 2004, Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, head of the Church's Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith and the future Pope Benedict XVI, sent a memorandum addressed to the US episcopal conference, outlining principles of worthiness to receive Holy Communion in the Catholic Church. Referring to a would-be communicant's stances on moral and political issues, Cardinal Ratzinger highlighted that when it comes to a Catholic's conscientious judgment, some issues have greater moral weight than others:

> Not all moral issues have the same moral weight as abortion and euthanasia. For example, if a Catholic were to be at odds with the Holy Father on the application of capital punishment or on the decision to wage war, he would not for that reason be considered unworthy to present himself to receive Holy Communion. While the Church exhorts civil authorities to seek peace, not war, and to exercise discretion and mercy in imposing punishment on criminals, it may still be permissible to take up arms to repel an aggressor or to have recourse to capital punishment. There may be a legitimate diversity of opinion even among Catholics about waging war and applying the death penalty, but not however with

regard to abortion and euthanasia.[3]

Let's set aside, for the moment, debates about war and capital punishment. The notable point here is Cardinal Ratzinger's principle that *not all moral issues have the same weight as abortion and euthanasia*.

What's more, a variety of factors can be involved in assessing an issue's importance for any given person. If a village on the other side of the world, in a remote, hard-to-reach area, is afflicted with a deadly virus, it is obviously a situation calling for attention. Yet, as grave as the situation may be, *you* may be unable to do much, if anything, to change things. But perhaps, to go back to an earlier example, you *can* affect the situation of the street gang graffitiing your neighborhood. Perhaps you and your neighbors can band together to keep an eye out for graffiti and report taggers to the police. Perhaps you can support community programs to direct young people into constructive activities.

You may in fact assist that remote village through prayers, donations, and urging your government to help. But although human life itself is at stake there, you can legitimately choose to focus more of your resources to help your immediate community, because you can more readily help solve its problems.

Here is a related but distinct point when it comes to applying Catholic social teaching to various issues: some issues involve things that are *wrong per se*. These are things often referred to as *intrinsically evil*. Abortion, euthanasia, genocide, and intentional targeting of civilians in war are examples. Intrinsic evils may *never* be chosen or supported as political rights or policy objectives.

Yet some things aren't intrinsically evil. They can be wrong *under certain conditions* yet morally acceptable under others. Going to war is one example. We will discuss the Church's just-war teaching later. Here it suffices to note that whether war is morally justified depends on a variety of factors—unlike abortion, euthanasia, genocide, and intentionally targeting civilians in war, which are unjustifiable *in principle*.

Or consider tax cuts, which are neither good nor bad *as such*. In some situations, cutting taxes can be the right thing to do. In other situations, lowering taxes may cause government to be unable to fulfill its obligations to all citizens, with some citizens being seriously harmed.

Catholics should oppose things that are always and everywhere wrong (intrinsically evil). It's impossible to support or promote such things without formally cooperating with them, and, in a sense, without making such evils our own. But this does not mean that so long as something is *not* intrinsically evil we may support it or that we can never be morally obliged to oppose it.

How one should approach an issue involving good and evil depending on circumstances is a question of *prudence*. We discuss the role of prudential judgment elsewhere.

5. Can you explain the main principles and themes of Catholic social teaching?

We've already touched on human dignity. Let's look at the common good, the call to family and community, participation, solidarity, and subsidiarity.

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* quotes Vatican II when it describes the *common good* as "the sum total of social conditions which allow people, either as groups or as individuals, to reach their fulfillment more fully and more easily" (1906, quoting *Gaudium et Spes* 26, 74). That's a mouthful, so we should take some time to understand it.

A common good is a good in which many can share without its being diminished. Knowledge is a common good. *Your* knowing doesn't reduce the amount of knowledge for *me*. Peace is a common good. We can all share in it, and our doing so doesn't mean the other has less peace.

The common good is the good of a group *in its members*, the good that all members can share and from which they all benefit. In a political community, it is the good or set of goods political authority exists to foster for its citizens (CCC 1910).

People live together in political society to obtain, or to obtain more easily,

things necessary for their genuine human fulfillment. They have a moral obligation to act for what is good, which means in ways consistent with their authentic fulfillment—living *well*. They come together in a political community to secure their *rights*, so they can fulfill their *responsibilities* as human beings, and thus live well.

Catholic teaching on the common good holds that public authorities and the citizens of the community must respect each individual citizen's rights, and they must contribute to the conditions by which citizens and groups of citizens can thrive. When public authority and individual citizens respect each citizen's rights, we can speak of society fostering social justice and peace.

Next is *the call to family and community*. Human beings are by nature social. That means, among other things, that for us to thrive and develop we need certain good things obtainable only, or more easily, through our relationships with other people. The "original cell of social life," as the *Catechism* puts it (2207), is the family, *a community of persons founded on marriage*. And marriage, though some people dispute this today, is the enduring and exclusive life-union of a man and a woman. Because the human person comes to be through the sexual union of a man and a woman, society ought to value and honor the social institution, marriage, that fosters and strengthens that life-union and helps educate the children who come from it.

Although family is a fundamental component of society, there are other parts of community life. Churches, civic organizations, political parties, businesses, social-service agencies, and various other "intermediate" bodies (between the individual and the state) can also contribute to the good of society.

The common good further requires that all members of society *fulfill their responsibilities* as well as receive their rights. Through participation—taking part in—everyone benefits from the common good, and everyone is morally obliged to contribute, in appropriate ways, to it. This includes taking responsibility to provide for oneself and one's dependents and

obeying just and reasonable laws. Participation also includes activity in public life and the political order, which public authorities should foster.

The two ideas of *solidarity* and *subsidiarity* are closely linked. John Paul II described *solidarity* as "a firm and persevering determination to commit oneself to the common good. That is to say, to the good of all and of each individual, because we are all really responsible for all" (*Sollicitudo Rei Socialis* 38).

John Paul II saw solidarity as a virtue or good habit; in this case, the habit of committing oneself to the common good. We can also think of it more broadly as a social principle. Each member of society, according to his position and prospects, should develop the virtue of acting for the common good, recognizing a responsibility not just for himself but also for others. Public authorities must recognize their responsibility to "the good of all and each individual," not only of the powerful or their political base. "We're all in this together" might describe the idea behind solidarity.

Solidarity is the principle by which we help one another by contributing to the common good, and *subsidiarity* also involves helping. (The word is related to the Latin *subsidium*, meaning "help.") Sometimes, individuals or groups need help to achieve some good they rightly seek. But help can come in many forms. Positively, it can come from somewhere else—from a higher organization or authority—providing people with what they need to do something for themselves. Negatively, it can come from the higher organization or authority getting out of the way and leaving people alone to act.

"A community of a higher order should not interfere in the internal life of a community of a lower order," wrote John Paul II (echoing Pius XI), "depriving the latter of its functions, but rather should support it in case of need and help to coordinate its activity with the activities of the rest of society, always with a view to the common good" (*Centesimus Annus* 48).

The idea is the proper relationship between certain aspects of society. In a community, there are higher or more generalized authorities, groups, and organizations, and lower or more specialized authorities, groups, and

organizations.

For example, in the United States, we have the national government, which has a certain jurisdiction over the whole country, and we have state and local governments, which have more restricted regional and local jurisdictions. Some matters are more properly the responsibility of the national government—for instance, conducting foreign policy. Other matters are more properly the responsibility of state and local governments—for example, issuing drivers' licenses and regulating neighborhood street cleaning.

It would be ridiculous if the national government tried to tell every city, town, and village in America how to clean its streets or to dictate every detail of how drivers should be licensed to drive on those streets. Subsidiarity is the principle by which social responsibilities and contributions are "right-sized," empowering those operating at the *most immediate level* possible. It helps people do for themselves what they are capable of doing rather than leaving them dependent on others or having their freedom or creativity hindered unnecessarily by "higher-ups."

Of course, sometimes the higher-ups must intervene, because those at the more immediate level lack the wherewithal to do what needs to be done. Solidarity then comes into play, with the wider community or more general authority acting to assist the more specific community or localized authority. Catholic social teaching, though, holds that the principle of subsidiarity ought to apply as much as possible, with the more immediate actors being assisted or allowed to accomplish what needs to be done. Where solidarity involves all members of society recognizing their responsibility for one another, subsidiarity allows others to do as much as they can to contribute to the common good for themselves.

6. Does Catholic social teaching change?

Like the rest of Catholic teaching, the fundamentals of Catholic social teaching are permanently relevant and unchanging. They reflect the unchanging truth about man. They are part of the fullness of divine

revelation Jesus brought to us as God's definitive Word. "You shall not murder" could not have been a true moral principle in the year 120 but today be wrong. "You shall not steal" couldn't have been true a hundred years ago but be false today. The essentials of human nature remain the same. God's plan for humanity remains the same. So Catholic social teaching remains the same.

Still, Catholic social teaching can change in the sense in which we say Catholic doctrine "develops." Over time, doctrine gets clarified in various ways as new questions or challenges arise.

Under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, and in response to questions or even objections raised within the Church, the Church deepens its understanding of God's revelation. It can put its beliefs into new language, drawing on new ideas, to better express its faith, or it can reject new ways of putting things that leave out or contradict things it believes.

This process of listening to questions, responding to objections, and expressing the Church's faith in specific language is part of the *development of doctrine*. Over time, it is possible for the Church's beliefs, while remaining fundamentally the same, to develop or change in how they are expressed, with some implications of those beliefs, perhaps previously unrecognized, being spelled out and some ways of presenting ideas once thought helpful being dropped.

What is true of Catholic teaching in general is true of Catholic social teaching in particular. Catholic social teaching, while remaining fundamentally the same, can develop. The Church can come to see better the social implications of its beliefs. For example, although early Christians often tolerated slavery as a "given" in a fallen world, and some later Christians approved slavery as compatible with Christianity, the Church eventually recognized slavery as contrary to fundamental human equality and inherently contrary to justice.

Related to the idea of the development of doctrine is the fact that the moral law, which guides how we should treat one another, sometimes needs to be applied differently in different cultural situations. One society's evils

aren't necessarily another's. One community may have more resources available to address a problem than another community. How Catholic teaching is applied can vary greatly as social evils—and social opportunities for good—vary.

Although the Catholic Church has always opposed abortion, it did not need to speak out as forcefully on the topic in nineteenth-century America as it speaks about it today. Why? Because abortion wasn't as widespread then as it is today; nor was it generally approved by civil law; indeed, it was illegal almost everywhere. But circumstances changed, as the US Supreme Court in *Roe v. Wade* (1973) declared abortion a constitutional right. Thus, the Church, in order to defend the right to life, had to speak more forcefully against abortion.

Similarly, although the Church has always opposed exploitation of poor people, the rise of modern industrial societies created a situation in which Catholic teaching developed and was better expressed on issues such as the rights of workers, private property and the proper use of material resources, the role of government, and the equitable distribution of goods through dynamic economic life.

These examples do not involve a change in the substance of Catholic social teaching but refinements of expression, different emphases, and different practical applications of it to the needs of other times and places.

7. What does the Church teach about "life issues"?

"Life issues" are those social questions that touch directly on the right to life, including abortion, destruction of embryos outside of the womb, murder, euthanasia, and unjustified killing in war and in civil society.

Human life is sacred, according to Catholic social teaching, from conception to natural death, in whatever stage of development or condition of dependence. Human beings have the *natural right to life*. That means, among other things, that the obligation we have to respect the lives of others, and even our own lives, doesn't come from mere common agreement or human laws; it comes from God, because he has created

human beings with an inherent dignity. This dignity gives him a right to life that exists prior to any agreement or human law.

All human beings have a right to life. Thus, the Catholic Church opposes murder, abortion, destruction of human embryos outside the womb, and euthanasia. Likewise, in certain circumstances the Church opposes killing even in warfare. Similarly, forms of killing otherwise justly carried out by authorities in civil society can be wrong—such as unnecessary killing in police actions and the unjustified imposition of the death penalty.

What's more, the obligation to respect the good of human life includes the obligation to respect the good of our own lives. The fact that we are *rights-bearing beings* means that we have obligations to fulfill when it comes to choosing what's good and right. We couldn't reasonably claim the right not to have to fulfill our responsibilities toward our own lives without undercutting *any* claim to rights. Thus, Catholic social teaching opposes *voluntary euthanasia* and laws promoting "death with dignity" and assisted suicide.

Sometimes people will speak of being "personally opposed" to some action that brings about the death of an innocent human being, while still favoring laws permitting the action. For example, people sometimes speak of being personally opposed to abortion while not wanting to "impose their morality" on others. Catholic social teaching rejects this approach.

Government exists, according to Catholic social teaching, to promote the common good of its people, including the securing of their natural rights (CCC 1897, 1902, 1903, 1907, 1910). Since every human being has the natural right to life, government ought to pass and enforce laws safeguarding the right to life for everyone, from conception to natural death. Consequently, Catholics have an obligation to be more than "personally opposed" to an action or a law (as with abortion or euthanasia) allowing the taking of innocent human life. We must oppose such actions and laws as wrong.

Abortion is a life issue because it unjustly kills an unborn child, whose natural right to life exists from conception throughout pregnancy. Laws

allowing abortion violate the right to life of unborn children and must be opposed. Similarly, destroying human embryos outside the womb, by discarding them as unneeded "leftovers" from in vitro fertilization or in order to harvest their stem cells, is wrong. Laws permitting such killing are likewise wrong and must be opposed.

"The human being is to be respected and treated as a person from the moment of conception," according to Catholic social teaching, "and therefore from that same moment his rights as a person must be recognized, among which in the first place is the inviolable right of every innocent human being to life" (*Donum Vitae* I, 1). Thus, abortion and embryo destruction may not be done, nor may they be authorized by the civil law.

Murder is obviously wrong. Our society doesn't legally authorize murder, unless we use the word *murder* the way Pope Francis did when he spoke of abortion as "the murder of children,"[4] or if we apply the word to other kinds of unjust killing. At the same time, if civil authorities don't justly and adequately distribute resources for law enforcement, or if police or courts act improperly in enforcing the law, the result may be murders that otherwise would not have occurred, as well as unjustifiable deaths through the intentional use of excessive force. So these things, too, are life issues.

Euthanasia is a life issue because it involves doing something, or failing to do something, that causes the death of a person with a disability, sickness, or terminal condition. Laws allowing euthanasia violate the right to life of such people, even when they're intended to end suffering or redirect financial or medical resources.

Furthermore, as we have seen, voluntary euthanasia or laws allowing so-called death with dignity and assisted suicide purport to give the person who seeks to kill himself an absolute authority over his life that no human being can rightly claim. In addition, assisted suicide, far from being a matter of mere private or personal choice, involves the government authorizing someone to kill another human being.

According to Catholic social teaching, suicidal persons and people with disabilities, sicknesses, or terminal conditions need to be treated with

respect, dignity, and care, which excludes deliberately seeking to end their lives—with or without their consent. Laws supporting euthanasia, as well as the practice itself, must be opposed as contrary to the dignity of human life.

What about the *death penalty*? Catholic teaching has traditionally held that under certain circumstances, the state may morally punish criminals with death, but in recent times many Church leaders have come to reject its use in favor of non-lethal alternatives.

Genesis 9:6 has traditionally been cited to support the idea that the death penalty may sometimes be a just punishment: "Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed; for God made man in his own image." In Romans 13:4, Paul writes, "But if you do wrong, be afraid, for [the civil authority] does not bear the sword in vain; he is the servant of God to execute his wrath on the evildoer."

The Church Fathers who addressed the issue generally concurred that the state may justly employ the death penalty, as did the medieval popes and their successors until recent times. The sixteenth-century *Roman Catechism* referred to the death penalty as a form of "lawful slaying [that] belongs to the civil authorities, to whom is entrusted the power of life and death, by the legal and judicious exercise of which they punish the guilty and protect the innocent." The death penalty was justified on numerous grounds, including the just, proportionate punishment for the criminal's offense and the protection of the innocent.[5]

In the period following the Second Vatican Council (1962–1965), the popes and other Church leaders came to hold a negative view of capital punishment, while not teaching that the death penalty is intrinsically wrong or never justifiable. John Paul II held that civil punishment "ought not to go to the extreme of executing the offender except in cases of absolute necessity: in other words, when it would not be possible otherwise to defend society. Today however, as a result of steady improvements in the organization of the penal system, such cases are very rare, if not practically nonexistent" (*Evangelium Vitae* 56). Many other contemporary Catholic leaders, including Pope Francis, hold the death penalty to be "inadmissible"

today, and urge Catholics to work for its abolition (CCC 2267).

8. What is the consistent life ethic?

The *consistent life ethic* is an approach to human life and dignity that applies appropriate ethical principles to different areas as a basis for making sound practical judgments to protect and promote human life. It helps make sense of why Catholic teaching opposes abortion, for example, while also supporting access to affordable health care. The same principle about the value of human life informs both positions.

"Where life is involved, the service of charity must be profoundly consistent," wrote John Paul II in *Evangelium Vitae*. "It cannot tolerate bias and discrimination, for human life is sacred and inviolable at every stage and in every situation; it is an indivisible good. We need then to 'show care' for all life and for the life of everyone. Indeed, at an even deeper level, we need to go to the very roots of life and love" (87).

Sometimes people distinguish between "life issues" and "justice issues"—between matters such as abortion, euthanasia, and other forms of unjustifiable killing on the one hand and matters such as homelessness, health care, human trafficking, and racial discrimination on the other. The distinction can be helpful as far as it goes. But you'll notice that some social issues (such as marriage and family life or environmental concerns) don't easily fit into either category while others (health care and criminal justice, for example) arguably belong in both. An over-reliance on this distinction, then, can leave out important social issues or overlook how life issues also involve matters of justice—rights—and how justice issues also depend on the right to life and flow from it. The right to life, though not the only right, is foundational for the exercise of all other rights. At the same time, the right to life—being a right and therefore involving justice—is a "justice issue."

"It is impossible to further the common good without acknowledging and defending the right to life, upon which all the other inalienable rights of individuals are founded and from which they develop," wrote John Paul II.

"A society lacks solid foundations when, on the one hand, it asserts values such as the dignity of the person, justice, and peace, but then, on the other hand, radically acts to the contrary by allowing or tolerating a variety of ways in which human life is devalued and violated, especially where it is weak or marginalized" (*Evangelium Vitae* 101).

Pope Benedict XVI recalled how Pope Paul VI's encyclical *Humanae Vitae* "indicates the strong link between life ethics and social ethics" (*Caritas in Veritate* 15). He then connection Paul VI's connection of evangelization to human development: proclaiming Christ ought to lead society to improve the human situation. Christians are to be doers of the word and not just hearers (James 1:22). Conversion of individual people should help convert *society*—in its laws and civil institutions—to greater and more consistent respect for human life and dignity. Thus, putting one's faith into responsible action is also part of the consistent life ethic—consistency here being between what we *profess* and how we *live*.

Although most of us likely agree, in principle, with the idea of a consistent life ethic—because we'd rather think of ourselves as consistent rather than inconsistent—we may still fail to practice it. Ideology can affect us here. *Ideology*—defined in a negative sense as a set of ideas given vastly *more explanatory power than warranted* and held far *more firmly than justified*—can impede us.

Ideologies abound. The Marxist ideologue reduces everything to economics and class struggle; the Freudian reduces psychology to sex. The racist makes everything about race, the extreme libertarian ideologue about freedom of choice and self-ownership, and the radical feminist about oppression and liberation of women. Those are hardcore ideologies, yet our own ideas can become ideological, too, taking something true so far that it leads us to error. We can, as John Paul II once put it, treat a piece of the pie as if it were the whole pie. Ideology can blind us to the moral implications of Church teaching, and thus we can fail to apply it in our personal lives and in our social obligations.

Pope Francis warns against ideologies in his apostolic exhortation

Gaudete et Exsultate. He sees a danger of ideology leading some people to separate the demands of the gospel from "their personal relationship with the Lord." They come to treat Christianity as a political organization and ignore Christ. Social and political work, good as it can be, is no substitute for a relationship with Christ. Likewise, Pope Francis warns against a false prioritizing of social concerns, as if some human lives were inherently more important than others or as if, because *we* work to address a particular issue, it is the *only important issue* worth addressing.

He notes, for example, how some Catholics treat the plight of migrants as a "lesser issue" rather than a "grave issue" like abortion or other bioethical questions. Yet, he asks, can't we realize that this attitude contradicts Jesus' teaching "when he tells us that in welcoming the stranger, we welcome him"? (*Gaudete et Exsultate* 102).

Francis's point is not that all social issues are equally grave, or that abortion and migration are morally equivalent. Rather, he stresses how the *same human dignity* at stake in bioethical issues, such as abortion, is involved in the lives of migrating people. Both the unborn child *and* the migrant are human beings with the right to life. We shouldn't let a specific area of concern, whether it be abortion or migrant issues (or other topics), ideologically distort our valuing of human life in other areas.

The consistent life ethic can itself be misused as a kind of ideology. We can fall into the trap of thinking that everyone committed to a consistent life ethic must agree with our particular approach to every issue concerned with the right to life and human dignity. For example, sometimes the consistent life ethic is described as a "seamless garment"—a metaphor is drawn from the description of Jesus' robe in John 19:23. As that robe was woven as one piece from top to bottom, it is said, so should our approach to the various issues of life and human dignity be "of a piece." This makes sense from the perspective of a consistent ethic of life, but some people cite the seamless-garment metaphor to claim that anyone who holds to that ethic must therefore endorse a lengthy and specific set of political positions. Yet this contradicts the teaching of the Church that Catholics with well-formed

consciences may at times disagree on political issues. As Vatican II teaches:

> Often enough the Christian view of things will itself suggest some specific solution in certain circumstances. Yet it happens rather frequently, and legitimately so, that with equal sincerity some of the faithful will disagree with others on a given matter. Even against the intentions of their proponents, however, solutions proposed on one side or another may be easily confused by many people with the gospel message. Hence it is necessary for people to remember that no one is allowed in the aforementioned situations to appropriate the Church's authority for his opinion. They should always try to enlighten one another through honest discussion, preserving mutual charity and caring above all for the common good (*Gaudium et Spes* 43).

Catholics must agree on Catholic social *principles*, since these are the teaching of the Church, but they don't always have to agree about the best political *applications* of those principles in society.

Furthermore, equating a consistent life ethic with a "seamless garment" of particular political stances on all issues touching human life confuses the fundamental importance of all issues involving human dignity with the erroneous position that all moral issues touching on human life are of the same weight. As we have seen, something can be important, even gravely important, yet not of the same moral significance as something else.

Unfortunately, some people in politics employ this false notion of the seamless garment to depict themselves as good representatives of a consistent life ethic. They may wrongly equate the principle with their specific policy approach and they may wrongly put all life issues on the same level of gravity.

The Church wants Catholics to avoid two false alternatives. We must neither *relativize the absolute* nor *absolutize the relative*. Fundamental principles regarding human dignity and human rights are *absolutes*: they may never be violated, and Catholics, whether as citizens or political authorities, must respect these principles.[6] This is why they are sometimes

spoken of as *nonnegotiable*.

Catholics must also avoid *absolutizing the relative*—treating particular political approaches to issues as if they were themselves inviolable principles. The Church insists on "the legitimate freedom of Catholic citizens to choose among the various political opinions that are compatible with faith and the natural moral law, and to select, according to their own criteria, what best corresponds to the needs of the common good."[7]

9. What does Catholicism teach about war and peace?

According to Catholic social teaching, the purpose of political society is to promote peace. By peace is meant the "tranquility of order," as St. Augustine called it—that is, the serenity that results from people living in proper relation to one another, acting justly toward one other, and helping the community to thrive.

We call the order of people properly relating to one another *social justice* and the peace that results *civil peace*, or peace within a community. Peace between and among nations we call *international peace*.

According to the *Catechism*, the Fifth Commandment, "You shall not kill," obliges all citizens and all governments to work to avoid war (CCC 2308). War involves destructive conflict, inevitably including some unjustifiable killing; however, the Catholic Church teaches that war can, under limited circumstances, be justifiable. According to Vatican II, nations may lawfully defend themselves if all reasonable efforts at peace have failed (*Gaudium et Spes* 79; cf. CCC 2308). The principles for the justified use of military force are included in what is traditionally known as the *just war doctrine*. These principles (CCC 2309) are essentially defensive:

1. The aggressor must be acting to cause lasting, grave, and certain harm to a country or group of countries.
2. All other means of ending the aggression must be known to be impractical or ineffective.
3. The prospects of success of the military action must be serious.

4. The armed response must not create greater evils than the evil to be prevented by military action.
5. It falls to the prudent judgment of those with authority for the common good to determine whether military action is morally justified.

The Church also insists on applying moral principles to *conduct of the war*: "The mere fact that war has regrettably broken out does not mean that everything becomes licit between the warring parties" (*Gaudium et Spes* 79; CCC 2312). The moral principles (CCC 2313–2314) include:

1. treating noncombatants, wounded soldiers, and prisoners respectfully and humanely;
2. not obeying morally illegitimate orders such as commands to commit genocide. "I was just following orders" doesn't justify committing atrocities; and
3. not committing indiscriminate attacks and destruction. Civilians and noncombatants may not be intentionally attacked nor may otherwise justified attacks on military targets disproportionately harm noncombatants as a foreseen yet unintended consequence. (For example, it wouldn't

be morally acceptable to annihilate the whole population of a city to ensure the deaths of workers and the destruction of a nearby bomb factory.)

Related to the issue of war is the question of the development of weapons of war. Obviously, if a nation has a right to defend itself and to safeguard its people, it also has the right to obtain the means necessary to do so. At the same time, a disproportionate effort to secure arms can contribute to an atmosphere that makes war more likely. It can also redirect a nation's resources away from its citizens' urgent needs (CCC 2315–2316).

Jesus teaches, "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God" (Matt. 5:9). Catholic social teaching encourages the Lord's disciples to be peacemakers. Nations can foster peace in many ways, including by working to reduce the conditions threatening peace, such as envy, distrust, unjust social inequalities, and pride among peoples (CCC 2317).

10. What does the Catholic Church teach about the environment?

The Church teaches that human beings have a responsibility before God to care for and use the resources of the environment in a spirit of respect for the world as "our common home," to use an expression employed by Pope Francis in his encyclical *Laudato Si'*.

Catholic teaching on the environment falls primarily under the Seventh Commandment: "You shall not steal" (CCC 2401–2403, 2415–2418, 2456–2457). Stealing is the unjust taking of what belongs to another. Creation is something God intends for the proper use of the *whole* of humanity, including future generations. Hence, it's an aspect of the *universal destination of goods*, which we will discuss later. To harm creation in a serious way can be likened to theft. "The environment is God's gift to everyone," wrote Benedict XVI, "and in our use of it we have a responsibility toward the poor, toward future generations, and toward humanity as a whole" (*Caritas in Veritate* 48).

The proper use of creation includes mankind's exercise of *stewardship* or "delegated dominion" over creation: what the *Catechism* calls acting with "respect for the integrity of creation" (CCC 2415). In Genesis, after God creates various aspects of the cosmos, including different kinds of life on earth, he creates man in the divine image: "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth" (Gen. 1:26).

As the divine image, man has delegated authority over the rest of creation because he has a certain preeminence within creation (CCC 343). Indeed, although all creation is the work of God, man is "the only creature on earth that God has willed for its own sake" (*Gaudium et Spes* 24; cf. CCC 356, 1703, 2258). Human beings alone have the *dignity of personhood* (CCC 356–357).

Human preeminence, though, isn't a license to waste and to destroy. Mankind's dominion must be exercised in a manner consistent with God's purposes for creation (CCC 307, 373). God put man in the garden of Eden "to till it and keep it" (Gen. 2:15). This figuratively expresses humanity's primordial mission of collaborating with God in the ordering of creation. The word translated in English as "keep" can include the idea of *defending*. Left to itself, the garden of creation will not serve God's purpose in creating it, which included providing for man. Mankind must do the work of cultivation, tilling, and keeping (defending) the garden against the forces of chaos, and thus imitate God, who brought creation out of the "chaos" of nonbeing ("without form and void" [Gen. 1:1–2]). Man's tilling and keeping the garden reflects his responsibility to care for the environment and to use its resources to provide for the human family.

Unfortunately, human sin has created disharmony between man and the rest of creation, represented in Genesis 3:17–18 by the so-called curse of the ground: "Cursed is the ground because of you; in toil you shall eat of it all the days of our life; thorns and thistles it shall bring forth to you; and you shall eat the plants of the field." The dissolution of the body in death is

part of the alienation of man from the material order of creation: “In the sweat of your face you shall eat bread till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; you are dust, and to dust you shall return” (Gen. 3:19).

According to St. Paul, sin affects the order of creation, but the salvation of Christ will also redeem it when he returns to transform human existence:

> For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God; for the creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will but by the will of him who subjected it in hope; because the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and obtain the glorious liberty of the children of God. We know that the whole of creation has been groaning with labor pains together until now; and not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies (Rom. 8:19–23).

The Catholic approach to the environment entails not only cultivating and defending the original order of creation collaborating with God for the benefit of the whole human family, but also anticipating the transformation of the cosmos into the New Heavens and the New Earth (Rev. 21:1,4). The sacraments, especially baptism and the Eucharist, begin humanity’s participation in Christ’s New Creation, and ought to spur Christians to work responsibly to protect creation, the destiny of which is to be fully renewed in Christ (*Sacramentum Caritatis* 92).

When it comes to the environment and the dignity of the human person, there are two extremes to avoid. The first reduces human beings simply to one species among others and puts a priority on the environment over people: this is a form of *ecocentrism*. Prioritizing life as such over human life is *biocentrism*. Both of these conflict with Catholic teaching and put the dignity of the human person at risk.[8]

The other extreme reduces the natural world to mere raw material to be manipulated according to human desires. It can be regarded as a wrongheaded form of *anthropocentrism*, or “human-centeredness” (*Laudato Si’* 115–121). Human dignity is regarded as so transcending

nature that man's dominion isn't exercised as stewardship but as absolute dominion. Such a reductionist view may still require some regard for the environment, but merely out of practical motives.

As with many aspects of Catholic social teaching, the Church generally allows for different political approaches for safeguarding the environment. Even as Pope Francis, for example, insists that a frank look at the situation will lead people to see serious threats to "our common home," he also acknowledges that "on many concrete questions, the Church has no reason to offer a definitive opinion; she knows that honest debate must be encouraged among experts, while respecting divergent views" (*Laudato Si'* 61).

The Catholic approach can be summarized as what Francis calls "integral human ecology." This view appreciates nature in its own right, as part of God's creation and as manifesting his glory. It affirms human dignity and the proper ordering of nature to man's stewardship. Furthermore, it insists that human stewardship of the environment be carried out according to the universal destination of goods, which requires a just sharing of the goods of nature among mankind, especially in light of the needs of the poor—linking "environmental ecology" to the "human ecology" of authentic development (*Caritas in Veritate* 51). Finally, it involves conversion of personal life toward a greater detachment from material goods.

11. How do marriage and family life fit into Catholic social teaching?

The Church's teaching on marriage and family life is based on the Fourth Commandment, "Honor your father and your mother," and the Sixth Commandment, "You shall not commit adultery."

As the union of a man and a woman, marriage is closely related to family, and both are at the core of God's purpose for human beings: "So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. And God blessed them, and God said to them, 'Be fruitful and multiply'" (Gen. 1:27–28).

Jesus reaffirmed this teaching: "Have you not read that he who made them

from the beginning made them male and female?" he asked wrongheaded critics seeking his approval of divorce and remarriage (Matt. 19:3–9). Quoting Genesis, Jesus also reaffirmed as part of the divine plan that marriage gives rise to children, and children in turn marry: "'For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.' So they are no longer two but one" (Matt. 19:4–6).

Though God doesn't call everyone to marry, marriage and family life remain essential parts of his plan for humanity. This is one reason Catholic social teaching holds family to be the foundational, "vital cell of society" (*Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church* 5). The well-being of society depends on the well-being of its families. Consequently, society should be structured, and its members should act, to foster the good of family life.

The family is a small society in itself, deeply connected to and founded on marriage. Marriage gives rise to the family; families provide the loving context in which children mature and from which many people go on to marry and establish families of their own. Society is, in a sense, a community of families and extended families.

Marriage is the intimate partnership of life and love between a man and a woman on which family depends. As a socially recognized institution, marriage exists to foster the mutual good of the husband and wife and the good of any children they may have. To understand this requires some reflection on the natural significance of human sexuality.

Through acts of sexual union, people come to be. In that sexual union, a man and a woman unite to become "one flesh"—that is, they join with one another to form a bodily communion of persons, each adding his or her distinctive element to the bodily union and receiving from the other. The man gives himself to the woman by entering her and thus receives her unto himself. The woman receives the man into herself and thus gives herself in this way to the man. In this union there is equality and complementary difference.

This mutual, complementary giving and receiving occurs as the two unite their most intimate bodily aspects. By engaging together in the kind of act by which new human beings naturally come to be, they become, at least in principle, a common source of new life. Their act of bodily union *naturally signifies* or points to the coming-to-be of new human beings, even if the couple don't expressly intend it to do so.

New human beings thrive and mature best when they are raised by their parents. That common life in parenting is best achieved by a child's parents having an exclusive, enduring partnership, a committed sharing in life and love—which their sexual union also naturally expresses whether they intend it to or not.

This intimate, exclusive, enduring partnership of a man and a woman is called *marriage*. The small society in which a married man and a woman live their commitment to one another and to their children is called *family*.

"It is in the family," declares the *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, "that the mutual giving of self on the part of man and woman united in marriage creates an environment of life in which children 'develop their potentialities, become aware of their dignity and prepare to face their unique and individual destiny'" (212).

The family, as John Paul II put it, is the place where a child receives his first formative ideas about what is true and good. The family is where the child "learns what it means to love and to be loved"—what it means to be a person (*Centesimus Annus* 39).

Society rightly honors men and women who commit themselves to marriage. Among other reasons, this is because marriage represents the social foundation of the larger society. Marital unions naturally tend toward bringing new members of society into being and, as we have said, the committed union of parents provides the best circumstances for children to thrive and mature, and for parents to fulfill their responsibilities to them. Consequently, society ought to recognize, honor, and otherwise foster marriages. They are human relationships that, by their nature, are of *public interest*, since they represent and foster the continuation of society—and

thus are rightly part of Catholic social teaching.

Of course, children are sometimes begotten and raised outside of marriage, and married couples can fail to live out their union lovingly and faithfully. But this doesn't mean that society shouldn't favor the marital union as the appropriate context for begetting and raising children. And there are, to be sure, other forms of social relationships and unions that some societies now treat as the equivalent of marriage. Some of these involve men and women living together in uncommitted sexual relationships (*de facto* unions); others involve persons of the same sex in sexual relationships, whether committed or not. These relationships must not be treated as if they signify, and contribute equally to, the good of society as does marriage and marriage-based family, regardless of the subjective value those in such unions think they find within them.[9]

As Pope St. John Paul II wrote in his *Letter to Families*,

> Marriage, which undergirds the institution of the family, is constituted by the covenant whereby "a man and a woman establish between themselves a partnership of their whole life," and which "of its own very nature is ordered to the well-being of the spouses and to the procreation and upbringing of children" [canon 1051§; CCC 1601]. Only such a union can be recognized and ratified as a "marriage" in society.

Allowing "moral permissiveness" regarding the nature of marriage and the family, he continues, "cannot fail to damage the authentic requirements of peace and communion among people." Thus when it comes to marriage, he warns political leaders "not to yield to the temptation of a superficial and false modernity" (17).

Pope Francis likewise laments the "failure to realize that only the exclusive and indissoluble union between a man and a woman has a plenary role to play in society as a stable commitment that bears fruit in new life." He recognizes that apart from marriage there exist a "great variety of family situations that can offer a certain stability," but stresses that these "may not simply be equated with marriage" (*Amoris Laetitia* 52).

Although marriage and family are rightly of public interest and concern, they are not creations of the state. They are forms of human society that precede the state. Thus, it doesn't fall within the authority of government to define marriage and family but only to recognize, to affirm, support, and protect them. The state exists to serve the good of human persons, including the most basic cell of society—the family founded on marriage.

Married couples have the right to determine the size of their families, with due regard for the good of the family, the common good, and the moral law.

In our political activity, Catholics are obliged to work for the good of marriage and family life. We ought to support social efforts to distinguish marriage from cohabitation or civil unions, and especially from so-called "same-sex marriage."[10] We should work to promote a society where men and women are encouraged, according their vocations, to enter marriage and establish families. We should likewise aim to promote a society of economic opportunity that fosters marriage and family life.

12. What does the Church teach about the economy?

We should try to use well the earthly goods God has given us. Among other things, that means respecting others in their property. The Seventh Commandment regulates the use of property: "You shall not steal." The Tenth Commandment regulates our attitude toward it: "You shall not covet anything that belongs to your neighbor." Catholic teaching on economics is based on those two commandments.

God made earthly resources available for the proper use of all. He intends everyone to have enough. From the goods of creation, God desires people to care for themselves and others for whom they are responsible (CCC 2402), especially with respect to the family and the poor. The Church's "preferential option for the poor" means that the material, cultural, and spiritual necessities of those in need take priority over the concerns of those who are not lacking these essentials, although charity extends to all (*Centesimus Annus* 57).

The Catholic Church refers to God's gift of earthly goods to all mankind

as the *universal destination of goods* (CCC 2403). This general gift doesn't preclude private property—the possession of goods by individual persons or groups. Indeed, private property helps individuals, families, and other groups to obtain a measure of security, to develop in virtue by property's proper management, and to help others in need (*Centesimus Annus* 43).

The universal destination of goods *does* limit both how much private property in principle can justly be amassed and how firm a possession of private property any owner can justly have, according to the common good. No one may have so much that others lack what is necessary to live decent lives. If someone does possess such excess, government may justly require some of an owner's resources be used to provide for those who lack necessary goods (CCC 2406, 2408; cf. *Gaudium et Spes* 71). As Vatican II taught, "The right of having a share of earthly goods sufficient for oneself and one's family belongs to everyone" (*Gaudium et Spes* 68).

John the Baptist taught, "He who has two coats, let him share with him who has none; and he who has food, let him do likewise" (Luke 3:11). This teaching applies not just to personal conduct but also to society. Although a good society may frequently be able to address situations of those in need through personal generosity, where private charity is insufficient, government action may also be necessary (while nevertheless respecting the principle of subsidiarity).[11]

Christians are called, on the one hand, to a certain detachment from material possessions (Matt. 6:19–21; Luke 6:24; 18:22–23; 19:8–9) and, on the other hand, to provide for themselves (2 Thess. 3:10), to be generous in responding to those in need (Matt. 5:42; Luke 6:30; Acts 10:35; 1 John 3:17), and to see that justice is done (Matt. 23:23). Christians will be judged by how they have used the resources they have been given (Matt. 25:14–30; Luke 12:48).

Jesus said, "Take heed, and beware of all covetousness; for a man's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions" (Luke 12:15; cf. 16–21). Jesus also taught, "No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise

the other. You cannot serve God and mammon" (Matt. 6:24). The inordinate pursuit of money and possessions conflicts with the love of God and of neighbor.

St. Paul taught, "The love of money is the root of all evil" (1 Tim. 6:10). The modern expression of what Paul criticized isn't limited to the desire to obtain excessive amounts of money; it also includes the desire to obtain and consume excessive amounts of *stuff*. We call this tendency *consumerism*. In societies with relatively plentiful goods and services, and relatively wide availability of money, there can be the temptation to purchase more than we need or things we don't need.

The Church doesn't present a program for the best economic system, but rather moral principles applicable to how we should organize our economic lives. Broadly speaking, because the Church affirms the right to private property and to profit-making businesses, it can be said to support some form of market economy (*Centesimus Annus* 34–35). Catholic teaching rejects socialism, insofar as socialism involves government ownership of the means of production or hyperregulation of the use of property by its owners. Likewise, the Church rejects Marxism and Communism (CCC 2425).

At the same time, Catholic teaching recognizes limits to the market economy's ability to provide a just distribution of the earth's resources when left entirely to itself. Here Catholic teaching rejects extreme economic libertarianism and affirms reasonable regulation of the marketplace as important to the common good (CCC 2425).

13. What does the Catholic Church teach about work and a just wage?

Catholic teaching insists on the dignity of work and the necessity of just compensation. Work is not a punishment for sin; human beings would have worked even if they had not sinned, because human work is based on the model of the divine work of creation.

Genesis 1 represents God as a sort of workman creating the heavens and the earth. As God completed each phase of his project, as it were, he noted

that it was "good." When he finished the whole project of creation and "ceased" from his "labor" on the Sabbath, he declared creation "very good" (Gen. 1:31), much as we might expect a workman to look with a certain satisfaction on finishing a job well done. "Genesis shows what the dignity of work consists of," wrote John Paul II; "man ought to imitate God his Creator in working" (*Laborem Exercens* 25).

In the biblical story, God put man in the garden of Eden to "till and keep it" (Gen. 2:8, 15). That's a figurative way to describe man's role as one who works to perfect God's creation. *Tilling* the garden means acting on the elements of creation God made to bring out their potential. *Keeping* the garden means, among other things, safeguarding it from the threat of chaos.

Through the story of the garden of Eden, the Bible teaches us that work is part of the worship that man renders in thanksgiving to God, by helping the good of creation become even better.

Of course, sin entered the picture and disturbed the good order of things—man's relation to God, man's order within himself, the relations between human beings (especially between men and women), and man's relation to creation. The human relation to work was also distorted. Human beings find themselves alienated, in many respects, from the good of work. They encounter work as "toil," as wearing down human life rather than perfecting it, even while work remains essential for people to live.

Because of sin, even the best forms of work in this life have elements of toil. The hardship of toil can be united with the hardship Christ experienced as a carpenter and of course, above all, in his "work" on the cross. Toil can become part of the daily "taking up of the cross" to which disciples of Jesus are called (CCC 2427). With that said, observance of a day of rest, in which one can worship God and offer the week's work to him, is crucial (CCC 2184–2185).

Work is so central to God's plan for mankind that the Church speaks of the *right to work*, which follows from our moral obligation to work (*Centesimus Annus* 43; cf. *Laborem Exercens* 16). Among other things, this means that people ought not to be prevented from working for their

economic benefit and their moral well-being. It also means that society has an obligation to foster an economic environment in which people can find meaningful work.

The Church also teaches that people who work for wages ought to be paid *justly*. This includes being paid the agreed-upon compensation; it also means that employers ought not to use economic advantage to pay workers less than the fair-market value of their labor. Furthermore, there is a socially shared responsibility—among individuals, businesses, and government—for workers to be paid or otherwise benefit economically so as to be able to provide for themselves and their families, as well as to contribute to the common good (CCC 2428, 1867, 2434; cf. *Centesimus Annus* 8, 34; *Evangelium Gaudium* 204).

The issue of just wages and income sufficient to provide for oneself and one's family is complex. What constitutes sufficient income in one place may be insufficient in another. The respective responsibilities of the worker, the employer, and government can vary, depending on the worker's familial obligations, the circumstances of employment, and the other conditions (for example, tax deductions and social benefits). What applies to a full-time worker with dependents doesn't necessarily apply to someone working part-time and living without dependents. Society—including workers, employers, unions and profession organizations, and government—must work to establish economic conditions such that workers can provide for themselves and those dependent upon them, and that at the same time treats part-time workers fairly.

Catholic teaching also recognizes the right of workers to organize and to form unions to protect their rights and further their economic interests (*Laborem Exercens* 20; cf. *Centesimus Annus* 8). The Church also acknowledges the right of workers, under morally legitimate conditions, to strike. However, such actions must exclude violence and other things contrary to the common good (CCC 2435).

14. Does the Catholic Church teach that justice requires equality?

Justice requires both *equality* and *inequality*, and there are different kinds of both.

First, there is *inherent natural equality*. All human beings are equal in being . . . well, human beings. Possessing the same human nature, they are equal in having the innate traits and properties that belong to all human beings. Because they are made in the image of God, all human beings are *persons*—the subjects of rights and responsibilities. This is the *natural* or *personal equality in kind* of all human beings.

Second, there are *natural inequalities*. Although all human beings possess the same human nature, we tend to possess certain characteristics and traits in different degrees, with some naturally having more of this trait and others naturally more of that characteristic. Some people are natively more intelligent, others innately more athletic, still others naturally better disposed, while others less so, etc. We can speak here of *human inequality of degree*.

Because all human beings possess the fundamental equality of persons, they possess the same rights and responsibilities. Rights and responsibilities involve the circumstances of life—the standing we have in relation to one another, how we treat one another, the conditions and opportunities we afford one another. This implies another kind of equality, in addition to natural or personal equality—*an equality of circumstances or the conditions of life*.

All human beings have natural rights, which means that anything to which one human being is entitled *simply by virtue of being human,* all humans are likewise entitled. They should be equal in the circumstance or condition of possessing those things to which their equal, common, natural rights entitle them. This truth implies a basic social equality and precludes certain forms of discrimination.

According to Vatican II, "Every form of social or cultural discrimination in fundamental personal rights on the grounds of sex, race, color, social conditions, language, or religion must be curbed and eradicated as incompatible with God's design" (*Gaudium et Spes* 29).

The key term there is "fundamental personal rights." Racism—unjust discrimination on the basis of someone's race—contradicts the equality that someone is due because of his fundamental personal rights. Also contrary to the equality of fundamental personal rights is unjust discrimination on the basis of someone's sex and religion.

We distinguished natural, personal equality of all human beings, which is an *equality in kind*, from natural, personal inequality, which is an *inequality of degree*. These both concern *personal, natural elements* of equality and inequality. Now we can distinguish *fundamental equality of circumstances* that all human beings deserve, which is bound up with fundamental personal rights, from *inequality of circumstances*, which can be unjust but which also *may also be required by justice*.

Justice requires recognizing certain kinds of difference, including differences tied to inequality. The principle of just inequality is implied by Jesus' statement, "To whom much is given, much will be required" (Luke 12:48) and his Parable of the Talents (Matt. 25:14–30 and Luke 19:11–27).

Not everyone has the same talents, accomplishments, levels of virtue, or acquired abilities. Some inequalities are good—reflecting justice and diversity, facilitating humility, and enabling people to help one another. Furthermore, not all forms of *discrimination*—of making distinctions—are wrong. In distributing social benefits, for example, it isn't unjust to "discriminate" between those in need and those who are economically well off. Likewise, it is not unjust discrimination to distinguish between those who possess the proper qualifications for a job and those who don't.

Unjust discrimination comes into play when those who are equal in a pertinent respect are treated as if they were unequal, or when people who are unequal in a pertinent respect are treated as if they weren't unequal, and thus wind up disadvantaged.

Fundamental human equality means it is unjust discrimination to preclude people from possessing or obtaining what any human being, *as such*, needs to lead a good human life. But it doesn't exclude all distinctions or recognizing relevant inequalities. Indeed, it can be unjust not to recognize

inequalities.

For example, it is unjust discrimination to prevent someone from getting a job simply on the basis of race or sex or the possession of a disability that can't be reasonably accommodated. But of course it can be the case that, say, race or sex is a specific part of a particular job. It wouldn't be unjust, for example, to "discriminate" against a white man auditioning to portray Harriet Tubman, a black woman, in a movie. Likewise, it is reasonable to require good vision for airline pilots and brain surgeons, so it isn't unjust discrimination to exclude people with poor eyesight.

The basic principle of justice when it comes to equality and inequality is to *treat equals equally and unequals unequally in proportion to their inequality.*

Often the discussion of equality and inequality is cast in terms of *equality of opportunity* and *equality of condition*. Catholic social teaches stresses how fundamental human equality means everyone should have a basic equality of conditions, as we have seen. That is, everyone should be a "have" when it comes to those conditions respecting people's natural rights, including their economic, social, cultural, and political needs. There should be a minimum decent standard of material conditions including food, clothing, shelter, adequate employment or income, and access to healthcare. Basic cultural and social needs include education and sufficient time, outside of labor, for such things as leisure, rest, religious activities, and family life. People ought to be able to provide these things for themselves, but where they cannot, social assistance is necessary.

At the same time, there can and will be just differences among people who are nonetheless fundamentally personally equal. Equality of opportunity means all persons will have an equal opportunity to participate in the economic, social, and political life of society, but it doesn't mean that there must be equality of outcomes or results. Differences in innate endowments, in individual achievement, and other factors will affect outcomes.

Another consideration is that, for some people, unjust inequalities in background circumstances can lead to unjust inequalities of outcome,

despite equal opportunity. For example, if a minority group suffers generational unjust discrimination and significant deprivations of basic material goods, equal opportunity alone may not overcome the disadvantages of that group. In such a case we have more than natural, personal inequalities of ability and effort affecting the inequality of outcome.

15. What is liberation theology?

Liberation theology is a varied set of theological ideas and approaches that present the Christian pursuit of justice in terms of political and economic "liberation."

The gospel message isn't primarily about political or economic freedom. But as we have seen, it does have implications for political and economic life in this world. It can help promote authentic "liberation," even in political and economic spheres.[12] Unfortunately, though, false ideas of liberation can distort the gospel message.

Early in his pontificate, John Paul II referred to the importance of "the theology of liberation," but he insisted it be faithful to the whole truth about the human person and must properly understand liberation in Christ.[13] Later, he wrote to the bishops of Brazil, encouraging them to make sure the "correct and necessary theology of liberation" develop there and in Latin America.[14] His concern stemmed from Marxist interpretations of Christian liberation that were popular in Latin America and elsewhere.

Without rejecting the idea that the gospel, properly understood, can help foster nonviolent liberation from oppression and domination,[15] John Paul II and the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith under him rejected Marxist forms of liberation theology.[16]

The Church's criticism of Marxist liberation theology includes its transformation of every aspect of theology and faith into political terms. "Liberation" is reduced to political praxis or activity and political praxis is reduced to Marxism—expressed with adapted Christian ideas, terms, and practices. The gospel of the kingdom of God, which begins in human

history and yet ultimately transcends it, becomes, according to Marxist liberation theology, achievable in history through political praxis to overthrow political, economic, and cultural oppression (or what is interpreted as such). Marxist liberation tends to see the gospel's love for the poor as involving "class struggle," and the resurrection of Jesus and the Eucharist are emblems of political revolution.

The genuine liberation theology of Catholic social teaching roots liberation in the transformation of the human person through spiritual redemption and renewal in Jesus Christ. The Church's social teaching opposes social injustice, yet, while striving to eradicate sin in society, brings about reconciliation and human solidarity—not class struggle and the reduction of the fullness of the kingdom of God to a human reality in history.

16. What is the best form of government, according to Catholic social teaching?

God is the ultimate authority in the political realm as in all others. St. Paul wrote, "Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God. Therefore, he who resists the authorities resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgment" (Rom. 13:1–2; cf. CCC 1899). Jesus taught Christians to pray for the coming of God's kingdom to this world, so that God's will be done fully on earth as it is in heaven (Matt. 6:10). Meanwhile, Christians work within the imperfect world of earthly authorities and political communities.

Earthly authority comes from God, but as a result of man's need for social organization and cooperation (CCC 1897–1898). By creating human beings dependent on one another, God also made them dependent upon authority to coordinate their lives together for the good of all (*Pacem in Terris* 46).

The Church has no blueprint for the best political regime. "The political community and public authority are founded on human nature and hence belong to the order designed by God, even though the choice of a political

regime and the appointment of rulers are left to the free will of citizens," according to Vatican II (*Gaudium et Spes* 74). "If authority belongs to the order established by God, the choice of the political regime and the appointment of rulers are left to the free decision of the citizens," declares the *Catechism* (1901).

There are two elements to legitimate government described in the statements above: 1) government should reflect the order designed by God, which is found in human nature; and 2) the particulars of government are to be determined by the decision of the people. The first principle entails that authority comes from God and is to be exercised according to human nature —according to the common good, as we have seen. The second principle points to the consent of the governed, though of course their freedom to determine the details of government doesn't overrule the fact that authority must be exercised in a manner consistent with the good of human nature and the moral law.

As Pope St. John XXIII taught, government authority is needed to maintain the moral order and derives, ultimately, from God. "Consequently, laws and decrees passed in contravention of the moral order, and hence of the divine will, have no binding force in conscience, since 'it is right to obey God rather than men.' Indeed, the passing of such laws undermines the very nature of authority and results in shameful abuse" (*Pacem in Terris* 51).

Not *every* kind of political arrangement is acceptable, though. A form of government acting against the good of human beings (tyranny), or governing without people's consent (despotism), or both (tyrannical despotism), isn't a legitimate form of government. What's more, even if a given government is legitimate in a general way, this doesn't mean that all its laws or actions are morally acceptable, even those that have majority support.

Human circumstances vary. The ability of people to consent to a regime and to determine its rulers depends on many factors, including how knowledgeable and virtuous the people are as well as their history and the

social challenges they face. “In determining what form a particular government shall take,” wrote John XXIII, “and the way in which it shall function, a major consideration will be the prevailing circumstances and the condition of the people; and these are things which vary in different places and at different times” (*Pacem in Terris* 58).

The principles of a) the necessity of authority and of b) government by the consent of the governed allow for a range of political systems. Yet these principles and the kinds of regimes that can embody them will be, broadly speaking, democratic,[17] in the sense that democracy can be understood as government by the consent of the governed.

The Church has affirmed democratic government, while warning of its dangers as well (*Centesimus Annus* 46). In his encyclical *Evangelium Vitae*, John Paul II warned against idolizing democracy:

> Democracy cannot be idolized to the point of making it a substitute for morality or a panacea for immorality. . . [T]he value of democracy stands or falls with the values which it embodies and promotes. Of course, values such as the dignity of every human person, respect for inviolable and inalienable human rights, and the adoption of the “common good” as the end and criterion regulating political life are certainly fundamental and not to be ignored (70).

The Church recognizes the importance of wide participation of citizens in political life. In this sense, too, the Church favors a democratic approach to political life. Civic participation is part of fulfilling the Fourth Commandment, which, in addition to governing the relationship between children and their parents, also refers to the duties of citizens to their country (CCC 2199). Participation in public life includes such moral obligations as loving one’s country and obeying its laws, paying taxes, voting, and military service (CCC 1913–1917, 2238–2240).

17. Is there a right to immigrate, according to the Church?

The *Catechism* refers to “the right to emigrate” (2211).[18] In context, this is

a right the family, and by extension an individual, has in relation to the country in which the family or the individual lives. The country may not impede such emigration. By implication, it entails a right to move to another place to live and work.

"Every human being has the right to freedom of movement and of residence within the confines of his own state," wrote John XXIII. "When there are just reasons in favor of it, he must be permitted to emigrate to other countries and take up residence there. The fact that he is a citizen of a particular state does not deprive him of membership in the human family, nor of citizenship in that universal society, the common, world-wide fellowship of men" (*Pacem in Terris* 25).

Migration involves freedom of movement. In general, the Church recognizes that people should be free to move and reside where they can. That includes the freedom to flee oppression or other dire circumstances, and the freedom to seek a better life elsewhere. At the same time, the Church recognizes just limitations on the freedom of migration, including limitations resulting from the burden migration can impose on people living in the country where the migrant seeks to go.

The right to immigrate is a natural or human right. Nevertheless, governments may justly regulate its exercise for the sake of common good. This regulation includes not only the possibility of limiting it but of requiring "duties of immigrants toward their country of adoption," such as gratefully respecting the material and spiritual heritage of the nation to which they immigrate, obeying its laws, and helping with civic responsibilities (CCC 2421).

Welcoming immigrants, especially refugees, with due regard for the rights of the people of the receiving nation, is an important aspect of Catholic social teaching. Jesus teaches, "I was a stranger and you welcomed me" (Matt. 25:35), which applies to immigrants as well as others. Such "welcome" involves more than the just regulation of traffic across borders. In includes safeguarding the human rights of people who lawfully immigrate. It also means helping them integrate into the culture of their new

nation. And it involves integrating Catholic immigrants into the life and mission of the Church in their new homeland.

Although a country has the right to use the force of law to regulate the flow of immigrants across its borders, that doesn't justify all actions against immigrants who enter a country illegally. Even those who violate the law retain their fundamental human rights and should be afforded the due process that is part of natural justice. As John Paul II taught regarding the illegal immigrant, "His irregular legal status cannot allow the migrant to lose his dignity, since he is endowed with inalienable rights, which can neither be violated nor ignored."[19]

18. Does the Church support world government?

The Catholic Church supports *world peace*—the tranquility that is a just order among people within a nation and among nations. Peace among men requires some sort of common order (CCC 1909). To that extent, the Church encourages the establishment of a common order among nations (CCC 1911). But the details of such an order and the practicalities of establishing it are left to the upright consciences and prudent judgment of people committed to international peace (CCC 2442).

According to Vatican II, the world's people increasingly depend on one another. In order to promote the common good of all, including those peoples in dire need, the community of nations should organize itself (*Gaudium et Spes* 84). The idea here is that the good of individual persons requires a *community*; in turn, the good of the community—the common good—requires the fulfillment of individual persons, which includes each person's ability to contribute to the good of the whole and the help that organization provides to their contributing.

The Church affirms that there is a good of the human family. This is the *universal common good*. As public authority is needed to secure the common good of the nation, so some form of public authority is needed to secure the universal common good (CCC 1911).

The idea of an international public authority applies to the global

community of nations the same principle of solidarity that should operate in individual nations. Solidarity among nations means, among other things, all nations acting for the good of the others in addition to acting for their own good. This is especially important when we consider vast economic inequality among nations (CCC 2437–2442).

But genuine solidarity respects the individual members of the community. It does not try to eliminate them or to dominate them but seeks to enable them to fulfill themselves. Therefore, a just international order must also respect *subsidiarity*, recognizing the freedom of individual nations to fulfill their responsibilities to their own people.

As Benedict XVI taught,

> In order not to produce a dangerous universal power of a tyrannical nature, the governance of globalization must be marked by subsidiarity, articulated into several layers and involving different levels that can work together. Globalization certainly requires authority, insofar as it poses the problem of a global common good that needs to be pursued. This authority, however, must be organized in a subsidiary and stratified way, if it is not to infringe upon freedom and if it is to yield effective results in practice (*Caritas in Veritate* 57).

In families, parents exercise authority over minor children. Adult children ought still to respect their parents, but they manage their own affairs. Applying this to the idea of a world political authority, we can imagine a highly structured regime, like the benevolent rule of parents over small children. Or we can imagine a confederacy of nations, with maximum national autonomy yet with close cooperative bonds with other nations, akin to the relations of adult children to one another and their parents. Subsidiarity points to the latter as the better form of an international order.

Catholics will differ about how feasible such a world political order may be, given the present state of world political powers with their national, ethnic, cultural, and political differences. Also, many Catholics have concerns about a form of government posing threats to human life and

dignity on a global level, especially given international efforts to impose on developing nations programs of abortion, contraception, and family models based on sexual ideologies contrary to marriage as a union of one man and one woman.[20] As a minimum amount of common political ideas, institutions, and virtues among its citizens is necessary for an individual nation to thrive as a single political community, so a world political community would require common political ideas, institutions, and virtues among its citizens.

By most informed observers' assessments, we are far, far from a common global political culture and thus far from world government being practical. Of course, this does not mean governments ought not to work for closer cooperation, for common recognition and defense of fundamental human rights, and for peace.

19. Does the Church favor particular political parties or candidates?

In general, the answer is no. The Church isn't a political action committee. Its mission isn't *essentially* political. As the *Catechism* states, "The Church, because of her commission and competence, is not to be confused in any way with the political community" (CCC 2245; cf. *Gaudium et Spes* 76). Vatican II put it this way: "Christ, to be sure, gave his Church no proper mission in the political, economic, or social order. The purpose which he set before her is a religious one" (*Gaudium et Spes* 42).

At the same time, from the Church's religious mission can "come a function, a light and an energy which can serve to structure and consolidate the human community according to the divine law" (*Gaudium et Spes* 42). The Church claims the "freedom to preach the faith, to teach her social doctrine, to exercise her role freely among men, and also to pass moral judgment in those matters which regard public order when the fundamental rights of a person or the salvation of souls require it" (*Gaudium et Spes* 76; cf. CCC 2246).

There are two extremes regarding the Church and partisan politics. One extreme is to act as if the Church's social teaching entails a specific,

detailed political agenda that *necessarily* aligns with a particular political party, candidate, or platform. This tends to undercut the freedom Catholics have when making judgments about how best to apply Catholic teaching in concrete political policies and programs. It also minimizes the extent to which well-informed, conscientious Catholics can legitimately come to different prudential judgments about how to foster social justice in the political realm.

The other extreme is to act as if the Church has *nothing* to say about political matters, or that its social teaching cannot lead the conscientious Catholic to align with a particular party or candidate. The right of the Church as teacher to pass judgment on matters related to fundamental rights and the salvation of souls means that the Church can stress how some matters *that happen to coincide with positions of parties and candidates* involve nonnegotiable moral principles. From this, the conscientious Catholic may conclude that he ought to support or oppose a particular party's or candidate's positions or join a particular party to advance the social good.

What has been said thus far applies to the Church as an institution and to the pastoral leadership of the Church. Often we speak of the episcopal leadership (bishops) of the Church as "the Church." That is a legitimate thing to do, because the bishops have the authority from Jesus Christ to speak in his name for his community. But the vast majority of "the Church" is the laity—over 99 percent. And the less than 1 percent represented by the clergy may be involved with politics, so long as their doing so doesn't compromise their ordained ministry.

According to Vatican II, when it comes to the political order, the laity should take the lead (*Gaudium et Spes* 43). The Magisterium of the Church teaches Catholic social principles and can call attention to specific evils, but it is primarily the laity who are to apply the principles and come up with solutions to specific evils. Political participation, including party membership and supporting specific candidates, can be one way the way laity do these things.

In that sense, "the Church" can be involved in partisan politics and support or oppose candidates. When that happens, we shouldn't be surprised that "the Church" includes differing political positions.

20. If the order of this world will end, and a new world will be established when Christ returns, why does it matter whether we work for justice?

We might similarly ask, "Why work to be healthy in this life if we're all going to die anyway and, God willing, will be resurrected to live a glorified existence one day?" One answer is: the gift of life is precious. How we respond to it is part of how we respond to God who gives us life, and this affects our relationship with God in the next life.

Besides, if we love God well, we will appreciate his gifts and use them as he intends. We will take reasonable steps to maintain our health because, apart from the fact this life will be longer and more pleasurable if we're healthy, we grow closer to God by respecting his gifts to us.

We can think of working for justice in the world in the same way. God desires that human beings live in right relationship with each other. *Justice* is the word for that right relationship. But why pursue justice when God will establish perfect justice in the age to come? Because how we respond to injustice in our world now affects how we relate to God now. And how we relate to God now affects our relationship with him in the life to come.

Of course, just as working to stay physically healthy generally makes our life better, so too would establishing justice make the world better. In this respect, we shouldn't make the perfect the enemy of the good. God will perfect the order of the world when Jesus returns and brings the fullness of the kingdom of God, but that's no reason not to begin to experience the benefits of justice now.

Jesus said peacemakers are blessed (Matt. 5:19). Christians should strive to be at peace with everyone (Heb. 12:14). If we want peace, said Pope Paul VI, we should work for justice.[21] Peace is the kind of tranquility that comes when things are in proper order and proper relationship. Another way to

describe such proper order is justice. So, Christians working to be at peace with everyone should work for justice in the world.

Sharing Catholic Social Teaching: Challenges and Directions.

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See Doctrinal Note on Some Questions Regarding the Participation of Catholics in Political Life 4; Family, Marriage, and "De Facto" Unions 47–48, and Considerations Regarding Proposals to Give Legal Recognition to Unions Between Homosexual Persons, especially 1, 6, 8–11.

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The *Catechism* here quotes Pope St. John Paul II, who, in addressing the rights of the family, refers to "the right to emigrate" (*Familiaris Consortio* 46).

World Migration Day Message, 1996; cf. *Gaudete et Exsultate* 101–102.

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